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The Use of Picture Books in the High School Classroom: A Qualitative Case Study

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies*

by

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May 2011

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Introduction

Picture books (stories in which the both the text and illustrations contribute to meaning) have long been thought of as appropriate only at primary grade levels because of their short length, simple plots, and minimal number of characters. When used in secondary grades, their principal function has been as remediation for struggling readers or English language learners (ELLs). However, anecdotal evidence and an exhaustive literature review strongly suggest that the supplemental use of picture books increases engagement and learning among high school students at all instructional levels. The purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of picture books on high school students' engagement with these texts.

A Synthesis of the Literature Review

Older learners and picture books

Originally intended for infant through primary grades readers, in recent years, the audience scope of picture books has expanded to include older readers (Giorgis, 1999). Terry Miller says there has been an emergence in the last 25 years of what he calls “sophisticated picture books” (1998). Additionally, picture books are rapidly gaining popularity among older readers (Olness, 2007).

Authors and illustrators now frequently choose the picture book vehicle for tackling complex topics, some that would be entirely inappropriate for young readers (Lott, 2001). Although a text may *look* like a picture book, it might not be intended, or even appropriate, for a young audience (Pearson, 2005). Thus, visualizing the term “picture book” must no longer be limited to an image of an elementary school teacher reading a *Dr. Seuss* book aloud to a roomful of young children; it must widen to include a

high school teacher reading a picture book to his students that addresses nuclear war (*When the Wind Blows*, Briggs); AIDS (*A Name on the Quilt: A Story of Remembrance*, Atkins); or homelessness (*Fly Away Home*, Bunting).

The issue of using picture books with older readers has several implications that must be addressed. First, there may be a perception among educators and administrators that picture books do not meet the level of rigor required in a high school setting. Beckman and Diamond point out that teachers may avoid using picture books for fear their administrators will not consider them rigorous enough (1984).

Persuading educators and administrators of their viability, though, is only half the battle. There is also the matter of students' attitudes when a teacher takes out a picture book. Students may perceive that they are being "read down to" and resist being open-minded to the experience. And of course, a student who has shut down is unlikely to learn.

Teachers who have not met resistance from their students when using picture books insist the answer lies in how the picture book is presented. If a teacher seems apologetic about reading a picture book out loud to a classroom of teenagers, the students will, of course, be put off (Giorgis, 1999). Likewise, if a picture book is demonstrated as a text that is inferior in some way to poetry, short stories, or novels, for example, the lesson using the picture book is less likely to be effective (Giorgis, 1999).

Beckman and Diamond insist that the way to address this issue is simply to listen to students' concerns (1984). When met with skepticism, they found these tactics successful:

- Encourage students to speculate as to the age of the picture book's author and illustrator.
- Ask students to refute or defend the notion that a good story line could be accompanied by illustrations.
- Front load the lesson with cues hinting at the intellectual nature of the unit.

They summarize, "Once their concerns have been recognized, students are free to stay tuned, their maturity and dignity intact" (p. 103). The teacher's attitude in the presentation of the text solves the issue of student skepticism. If the teacher respects picture books and firmly believes that the book will enhance enjoyment and learning, students will, too (Kane, 2007).

Effectiveness in the Classroom

Secondary teachers who routinely incorporate picture books into their curriculum attest to their success. They have postulated several reasons why this particular medium impacts learning in such powerful ways.

A consistent hypothesis as to why picture books connect with high school students addresses the visual nature of the medium. In a nod to learning styles (visual, auditory, and kinesthetic), several researchers believe many students may positively respond to picture books because they are visual learners (Carr, et al, 2001). Clearly, our students live in a world that has reached unprecedented levels of visual stimulation (Burke & Peterson, 2007). The interplay between text and illustrations may appeal to students who enjoy the same kind of experience when texting, playing a video game, or working on a computer.

Keith Polette at Fort Zumwalt High School certainly found this to be true (1989). After sensing students' waning interest in reading and books, he came to believe that his kids preferred their knowledge acquisition only via quick, entertaining, and visual means. At the same time, he faced declining interest from his students in vocabulary acquisition, noticing their particular dislike for explicit vocabulary instruction. His colleagues agreed. Polette then experimented with several ideas and eventually discovered tremendous success by using ABC picture books to teach upper level vocabulary. He believes, in part, that students respond well to his picture book lessons because of the visual nature of the texts.

A second reason picture books appeal to high school students is less easy to define, but no less powerful. Perhaps Giorgis explains it best when she proposes that a bond develops between the teacher and the students during a picture book read-aloud, a bond that reinforces the power of words (1999). The effect of this bond cannot be understated. It is as though the students observe a teacher taking a risk by presenting a picture book—which then suggests they, too, can consider lowering their guard. And it is precisely when their guard is lowered that students are receptive to learning.

Other educators have noticed the role picture books play in creating a safe learning environment for their students. This lies in part because picture books offer a medium in which all students, regardless of background knowledge or level, can succeed. Students who are reading below grade level don't have to exhaust themselves trying to comprehend a picture book text, which enables them to relax, a stance that certainly facilitates learning (Beckman & Diamond, 1984). The use of picture books can gain the

trust of reluctant readers, begin the process of building their confidence, and offer successful reading experiences (Kane, 2007).

Additionally, older students bring a set of beliefs, attitudes, and emotions into the classroom—not all of which may be positive or healthy. The use of picture book is one tool for building a sense of community in the classroom, a key component of a successful learning environment (D. Wellman, personal communication, July 6, 2010). Teachers can use picture books to create this sense of community through subject matter and the shared reading and discussion experience. For example, if a classroom contains a diverse group of students, such as migrant workers, gays/lesbians, teen parents, and struggling learners, teachers can choose a picture book that emphasizes the importance of appreciating differences. Teachers who have been using picture books to create a sense of community in their classrooms readily confirm the simple, non-threatening way a well-chosen picture book achieves this goal.

Another factor that explains why picture books can be a successful choice for high school students is engagement. For many of the reasons already explored, students find picture books appealing. Perhaps it is their novelty, their potential emotional impact, or even the social interaction they foster that engenders their positive reception (Just Read, Florida!, 2007). Students' engagement with picture books has been widely observed, and recent brain research emphasizes the link between engagement and learning (Just Read, Florida!, 2007).

A group of veteran teachers who have used picture books extensively note these engaging responses high school students often display when they encounter picture books (Matthews, et al, 1999):

- Recall particular memories
- Understand the essence of empathy
- Feel disturbed at negative aspects of human nature
- Describe childhood experiences
- Talk about favorite books from childhood
- Think about how to teach advanced concepts to young children
- Consider self image, peer pressure, conformity, and identity
- Connect colors to feelings
- Overcome a learning disability or difficulty
- Identify and relate to diverse cultures
- Recognize the nature of symbolic and literal walls

A final case explaining why pictures books are well received by high school students is simply this: “No matter how old they are, students love to be read to” (Panousis, 1999, p. 29).

The connection to early reading

In 1982, Louise Rosenblatt published her seminal piece “The literary transaction: Evocation and response” (p. 268-277). In the article, she defines the field-changing concept of transactional reading, as well as explains the two key reading stances: efferent and aesthetic. Her theories have relevance for understanding what can happen in a classroom when a teacher reads a picture book.

First, Rosenblatt defines reading as a two-way transaction between the reader and the text that occurs at a particular time and under particular circumstances. This encounter stirs up memories, activating areas of consciousness for the reader. In this

encounter, the reader brings past experiences, whatever they may be, “of language and of the world” (p. 268). In so doing, the reader establishes ideas about the current text—either fitting them into her existing understanding or revising her thinking to make way for new ideas and concepts (p. 268).

Teachers who have introduced picture books into their upper grade classrooms have observed this stirring up of memories that Rosenblatt describes. Fuhler and Walther illustrate what happens in a classroom when a teacher regularly uses picture books: “The kids gather around you and you begin reading. It’s like magic. There is a stillness in the room” (2007, p. 39).

This magical experience is further understood by Rosenblatt’s concept of reading stances. In her view, there are two kinds of reading experiences or, what she calls, stances. One, *effere*nt reading, occurs when the reader carries something from the text—such as information, instructions, an opinion, or a conclusion (p. 269). In an efferent reading experience, the reader narrows his attention to focus on what he needs to carry away from the event. Examples of texts that might facilitate an efferent reading event include a driver’s manual, operating instructions, a text book, or a political article. Rosenblatt so names this kind of reading based on the Latin term “to carry away.”

The second kind of reading episode a person might experience is an *aesthetic* reading event. In this case, Rosenblatt says, a shift occurs inwardly so that the reader’s attention moves to what is being created during the reading process. Not only does the reader encounter the text, but also her emotions, attitudes, and beliefs are stirred (p. 269). The intersection between the text and the reader’s stance as she experiences it creates an entirely new experience that the piece of writing not only facilitated but also becomes a

part of. Texts that might lend themselves well to an aesthetic reading event are stories and poems.

What is particularly interesting about Rosenblatt's concept of aesthetic reading is her assertion that this kind of reading occurs very early in a child's life, rather than only with mature readers, as one might think. Rosenblatt's believes the non-verbal responses she's observed in young children listening to poetry are indicative of aesthetic reading experiences:

- They sway to the sound and rhythm of the words.
- Their facial expressions reveal their sensitivity to tone of voice.
- Their posture reveals the actions being described.
- They clamor, "Read it again!" when the story is finished (p. 271).

Although Rosenblatt observed these responses in very young children, they mirror the responses teachers witness when they bring picture books into high school classrooms. Consider further details of Rosenblatt's aesthetic reading experience. First, the reader responds to the text during the reading event, perhaps with a verbal reaction, such as laughter or "talking" to the story, or a physical response, such as an unhappy facial expression or applause.

Second, the reader draws on past experiences with people and his world, with his past understanding of the link between words and what they mean, and with his past meetings with texts. For example, the reader might hear the word "quilt" and recall an image of a particular quilt on his grandmother's bed. Likewise, he might understand "quilt" as a noun, representing a type of blanket, and not a verb, meaning to sew a type of blanket.

Third, the reader listens to the sounds of the words—not just interpreting their meaning, but also experiencing the sounds the combination of letters that make up the words. This occurs whether the reader is hearing the story or reading it silently.

Fourth, in this kind of reading event, the reader fully allows his sensations to participate in the story, such as the feel of the chair in which he is sitting or the temperature of the air on his skin.

Fifth, the reader vicariously participates in the story, sharing the feelings and conflicts of the characters. This aspect of the story is one in which readers often share they lost track of time or forgot about their own concerns and surroundings as they became immersed in the story.

Finally, the reader responds, and that response can take any number of reactions: identification, disapproval, a sense of awareness of words and sounds, or even a contrast between what the reader thought when he began reading as opposed to his thinking as he finishes.

Secondary language arts teachers seek aesthetic reading experiences in their classrooms—although often to their frustration. They search for the elusive book that will transmit their own love of literature to the hearts of their students, creating lifelong lovers of literature. Teachers and avid readers “know how books have the almost magical power of creating experiences and summoning feelings” (FOR-PD, 2006). Yet secondary teachers’ best, most well-intentioned attempts to bring aesthetic reading into their classrooms does not often yield success. Walk into an early elementary classroom, and one would not be surprised to find students sitting on the floor, mouths hanging open, as they raptly listen to the teacher read a story. A step inside a secondary classroom of

any subject area often does not reveal students experiencing reading in that way. Rather, students are likely engaged in efferent reading—an experience driven by the need to “carry away” something from the text, likely in the form of an assignment. Their engagement probably runs the gamut from dogged persistence at best, to sleepy boredom at worst. As students move up through grade levels from primary to secondary school, they spend less time on reading for pleasure and more time on skills acquisition (Hunt, 2001), which likely explains their decreased engagement.

Why has this rather obvious shift from aesthetic reading in early grades to efferent reading in later grades occurred? Rosenblatt believes the alteration is a cultural, rather than a developmental one (p. 274). In later grades, educators over-emphasize efferent reading and largely ignore aesthetic reading because of several errors in thinking:

1. We wrongly believe students no longer have the capacity to experience aesthetic reading (p. 274). This is untrue, largely because any teacher will attest to aesthetic reading behaviors in a few of students who love to read so much, they ignore whatever is happening in the classroom, plowing through book after book instead of engaging in the learning community. Furthermore, although many adults spend long hours lost in the pages of captivating books, we don’t often notice that taking place in high school classrooms.
2. We wrongly assume that older students prefer reality over fantasy (p. 274). While this may be true for some students, it is certainly not true for all of them—plus this thinking suggests that fictive and aesthetic are synonymous. Examples of non-fiction texts that can facilitate an aesthetic reading experience abound.

3. Educators prize, perhaps above all else, to grow the cognitive thinking skills of their students. This may explain the emphasis on efferent reading over aesthetic reading in older pupils. Yet Rosenblatt argues that cognitive thinking requires imagination, which is much more strongly fostered in aesthetic reading events (p. 274).

Picture books foster an aesthetic reading experience in older students.

Furthermore, minds opened by memories, delight in sound, and a fully engaged emersion with a text—in other words, an enjoyable reading experience—are minds far more prepared to receive and integrate new content. The correlation between a student's enjoyment of reading and his attitude towards the lesson is clear (Hunt, 2001).

A final thought on the issue of early reading experiences' potential impact on upper level classrooms. Nilsen and Donelson identify the stages of literary appreciation in their book *Literature for today's young adults* (2001). In the first stage, which occurs from birth to kindergarten, children enjoy the sharing of books with trusted adults. The authors say that, in this stage, readers learn that pleasure and profit come from literature. Ideally, children in this stage are frequently read to from birth, experience trips to the bookstore or library to select books, participate in story-telling, and see and discuss movies. A key marker of this stage of literacy is enjoyably listening to adults read. The types of literacy materials that appeal to this stage of reader include nursery rhymes, folk tales, picture books, and television programs/movies (2001).

What is fascinating about Nilsen and Donelson's identification is the similarity between early reading experiences and the use of picture books in a high school classroom. In both cases, readers enjoy having an adult read to them, and one kind of

book in particular to hear and experience is a picture book. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that the literary stages do not end with the movement from one level to the next, but rather readers build into new levels while frequently returning to earlier ones. Their theories about literary reading levels support Rosenblatt's exhortation to teachers to facilitate aesthetic reading in older readers—as well as the success many secondary teachers experience when they bring picture books into their classrooms.

Many of the students who have walked into my classroom did not encounter positive early reading experiences. That loss is incalculable and most keenly observed in their deep resistance to independent reading. Time and time again, I've seen exactly those students open their eyes in wonder (and sometimes sadness, too) when I read aloud a picture book. During independent reading, they furtively reach for the picture books on my shelves. And when my classroom is empty but unlocked, it is the picture books that most often mysteriously disappear.

Case Study Overview

The potential impact to classroom experiences for students and teachers alike when picture books are used is significant. When well integrated into unit lessons, they offer pathways to deeper emotional connections and high order thinking skills for all secondary students.

The theoretical framework for this study draws from the literature review, which makes a strong case for including picture books as a supplement in secondary classrooms. Those classroom environments that include picture books tap into a compelling learning medium. Once teachers make a connection with students using picture books, a connection facilitated by mutual trust, shared reading experiences, comprehension of an

accessible text, and enjoyable engagement, they find that students' minds are particularly ready for rigorous concepts.

However, although anecdotal evidence abounds, structured case study work is limited. The purpose of this study, then, was to analyze the effects of picture books on high school students' engagement with these texts. Three research questions drove the case study process, all in consideration of the impact of incorporating a picture book into a unit of study:

1. How is student engagement impacted?
2. What changes occur in the classroom culture and climate?
3. Is student mastery of the material affected?

Participants

Participants were 83 ninth and twelfth grade students enrolled in two high schools in a metropolitan city in the southern part of the U.S. Faculty members were recruited to participate in a study of the use of picture books in a high school classroom setting.

The 22 twelfth grade students (14 female and eight male) are members of an honors Language Arts class at a large, rural high school west of the city. Taught by a young, energetic, male teacher with less than six years of classroom experience, as well as a female graduate intern from a nearby university, the class met from 7:20 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on Tuesdays and Fridays, with a short, mid-day instructional period on Wednesdays. Although the class would be characterized as "college prep," the teacher admitted students' level of engagement and mastery of new concepts were below expectations.

The remaining case study subjects all attend a high school in an affluent area north of the city. The students attend a sheltered, ninth grade campus and are taught by a

master teacher with district-wide recognition for best practices. Three of his classes participated in the picture book study:

- A group of 20 students (11 male, nine female) in a standard World Cultural Geography class, taught by the faculty member and a graduate-level intern from a nearby university. The class met daily from 12:15 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. (varying slightly on Wednesdays). The teacher and intern described this group as “difficult to engage” and “level one and two readers.” Furthermore, the sample included several English Language Learners (ELLs) not yet exited from their intensive language instruction courses but mainstreamed in other subject areas, including social studies.
- Two classes totaling 41 students (28 female, 13 male) in Advanced Placement Human Geography, taught only by the faculty member. Nearly half of the students in the classes are also enrolled in the school’s International Baccalaureate program. The back-to-back classes met daily from 10:30 a.m. to 11:15 a.m., and 11:20 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. The teacher characterized the students as bright and highly motivated, but also under considerable academic stress.

Case Study Procedures

Before beginning the formal case study, I met with the classroom teachers to discuss the research questions and choose suitable groups of students and units of study that would naturally lend themselves to picture book inclusion. For the purposes of broad analysis, it was important to choose multiple grade levels, subject areas, and perceived ability of students. The following table outlines the curricular units chosen:

Curricular Units

| Subject/grade | Instructional topic | Length of unit | Picture book title(s) | Other instructional sources |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| World Cultural Geography, 9 | Europe in World War II | Three weeks | <i>Rose Blanche</i> (Innocenti, 1985) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class text book Teacher-created notes, handouts, and assessments <i>Night</i> (Wiesel, 2006) |
| Language Arts, honors, 12 | Literary device: characterization | Three weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The firekeeper's son</i> (Park, 2009) <i>Don't let the pigeon drive the bus!</i> (Willems, 2003) <i>The lion and the mouse</i> (Pinkney, 2009) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class text book Teacher-created notes, handouts, and assessments "Prologue" <i>Canterbury tales</i> (Chaucer) <i>The wife of bath's tale</i> (Chaucer) <i>The pardoner's tale</i> (Chaucer) |
| Advanced Placement Human Geography, 9 | World agriculture | Two weeks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Tops & bottoms</i> (Stevens, 1995) <i>The rusty, trusty tractor</i> (Cowley, 2000) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class text book Teacher-created notes, handouts, and assessments |

Together, we collaboratively created the lesson plans, based on students' needs. In the social studies classes, the picture books were used as the anticipatory set of the lesson, whereas in the language arts class, picture books figured more prominently and were included in the anticipatory set, guided practice, independent practice, and informal assessment portions of the lesson. In all three classes, the teachers used their own evaluative assessments at the culmination of the units. The assessments included multiple choice and short answer responses.

Classroom Observations

The data collection process began prior to the beginning of the teaching units. I observed the target classrooms to collect qualitative data, particularly paying attention to the physical setting, as well as the mood, behavior, and engagement of the students and their teacher(s). Additionally, I wanted the students to become comfortable with my presence in their classroom, so that once the unit lessons began, my attendance would have minimal impact on the study.

During the lessons, which were taught by the classroom teachers or their interns, I functioned as an observer as participant, students having been apprised of my role in their class, but my inclusion in any class activities taking a subordinate role to that of information gatherer (Merriam, 1998). I chose an unoccupied seat (the same one each day) in an outside row of the class, with students sometimes occupying the seats next to or behind mine. Although I did not teach any of the lessons, I interacted with students during cooperative and independent practice, not assisting, but rather noting their processes and asking clarifying questions when appropriate. The field notes I collected during this portion of the study are comprised of sketches, notes from direct instruction, and (most prominently) student behavior, conversations, and reactions to the material.

It must be noted that my role as participant observer was not always easy to negotiate. Although I knew the teachers from previous educational interactions, I had never observed their classrooms. However, I held the belief that the two teachers were among the best in the district, so my expectations for their instructional delivery were high. Additionally, in my own teaching practices, I maintain that all students can learn and demonstrate academic growth, and that the responsibility for that goal rests fully with

the teacher. As both a teacher and instructional coach, therefore, I sometimes struggled in my observations to maintain sole focus on the students, often mentally veering into the realm of teaching. Outwardly, my role as participant observer did not deviate from the case study design, but my notes and interview transcripts often reveal a tendency towards instructional analysis.

Glesne and Peshkin (1991) have written extensively about the positive impact of a subjective observer—but the equally important necessity of disclosing these biases in the case study results. Called the “I’s of Subjectivity,” they reveal the roles and beliefs I hold that likely impacted my observations and interpretations. First, I embody the Teacher-Educator I. One of my journalism students explained this well when, in a letter of recommendation he wrote about me, said, “For Ms. Reiker, teaching is not a job; it’s a religion.” Furthermore, for as long as I can remember, I have loved books—their feel, their smell, and their undiscovered and rediscovered glories. Hence, Reader-Child I and Avid-Reader I both aptly describe me. It is interesting to note that the same two reading stance subjective I’s also describe the case study teachers and their interns—yet so few of their students.

Other Data Sources

In addition to classroom observations, I also conducted lengthy interviews with the teachers and their interns, the most in-depth ones occurring after the completion of the units of study, but a less formal set of questions were given to the interns after the first time they read a picture book to their students. The interview questions I directed to the interns were:

1. How did you feel as you read the story?
2. What did you notice about the kids during the story?
3. What was difficult for you about this lesson?
4. What was easy for you about this lesson?
5. What would you do differently next time you used a picture book with your students?

Because of their heavy teaching and schoolwork loads, the interns preferred to respond to the questions via email, which they did within a day of reading the picture books out loud to their students. Once all three units of study were complete, I gave the teachers the interview questions and met with them two days later, individually, to conduct the interviews. The interview questions were:

1. What did you think of using picture books in your classes?
2. Did you see instances where they increased student engagement?
3. Do you think using picture books increased student learning? If yes, describe how so. If not, why do you think they didn't help increase learning?
4. Is there a particular student or students you think the picture books impacted, either positively or negatively? Please explain.
5. How did using picture books impact *you*?
6. How do you see picture books fitting into your curriculum in the future, if at all?
7. Did anything surprise you about this project?

I recorded the interviews on a mobile phone application and subsequently transcribed and coded their content.

Finally, I generated extensive student documentation during the case studies.

Students responded, in writing, to a survey the day the picture books were read in their classes. Those survey questions were:

1. Before today, when was the last time someone read a picture book to you?
How old were you?
2. What do you think of the picture book you heard today?
3. Which did you like better—the story or the illustrations?
4. Did the picture book remind you of anyone or anything?
5. How did you feel as [teacher name] read you the story?
6. What would you say to a student not in this class about this story?

Other student-generated documentation included quick writes, journal responses, short essay responses, short stories, and unit assessments. All of these documents varied by class. The teacher created all prompts and assignments for the advanced placement students, whereas I worked with the teachers to collaboratively design the remaining coursework. In essence, these were all researcher-generated documents.

Analysis Methodology

Although essentially all qualitative analysis is content-based, content analysis was particularly applicable for this case study, as the substance of the interviews, observations, and documents revealed patterns and themes closely connected to the research questions (Merriam, 1998). The analysis methodology simply involved coding the raw data and then creating appropriate categories based on the emerging ideas. Because I approached the case study with a general hypothesis in mind and ready to be tested, I limited category construction to only those themes directly connected to picture book use in the classroom. Although related contexts also emerged, (i.e., use of technology and assessment types), I eliminated those areas of study as there was plenty of directly applicable data to mine.

In essence, each classroom and corresponding unit of study comprised one bound case study. After coding and analyzing the observations, interviews, and documents for each one of the three case studies, a cross-case analysis could begin. Not surprisingly, the patterns that emerged from all three studies lent themselves well to the development of unified theories that directly addressed the research questions.

Finally, I evaluated the end-of-unit assessments for each case study. As indicated, the teachers developed these multiple choice assessments without my involvement, as they were testing for the mastery of multiple skills (not only those addressed by the picture book study). For example, there were two picture books used for the Advanced Placement Human Geography case study. The first functioned as an anticipatory set for the entire agriculture unit, and the second was intended to solidify concepts connected to subsistence farming and agribusiness. However, the unit test included questions aimed at numerous additional skills and concepts, such as hearths, shifting cultivation, seasonal migration, and crop rotation. Those topics were not addressed with the picture books (only subsistence farming and agribusiness).

Therefore, for two of the cases, I closely evaluated the end-of-unit assessments for direct links to the picture books' content and lesson connections (for the remaining case study, individual student assessments were not available for analysis). In other words, I carefully read every question on the tests, noting any possible associations with the picture books. Finally, I parsed the results to determine how students fared on those specific questions. My purpose in doing so was not to perform an exhaustive quantitative analysis, but rather to get a feel for students' mastery of those skills verses the other skills tested (but not connected to picture book content). More importantly, though, I analyzed

the test results for the specific picture book questions to share my findings with the teachers. The results of the test analysis are described at length in RQ3 (below).

RQ1: Student Engagement

The first question I wanted to address via the case studies was: how is student engagement impacted by the supplemental use of picture books in upper level classrooms? What I discovered was that student engagement was clearly the most impacted area of interest in the entire study. The level of student engagement dramatically increased in every class during the time the picture books were read and discussed, and in some cases, the heightened student engagement continued throughout the unit and beyond its conclusion. The teachers and interns were unified and unequivocal in their belief that student engagement was positively affected by picture book use, and they all elicited surprise at the obvious impact on their students.

When the students first realized they were going to hear and see a picture book, their initial reactions were mixed. Because of the age question (addressed earlier), some students groaned, rolled their eyes, or made statements such as, “You are seriously *not* going to read us a kids’ book!” Others less concerned with self-image responded physically and verbally, displaying such behaviors such as hand clapping and childlike exclamations of happiness. Most, however, were simply quiet and revealed mild curiosity through attention to the activity.

Child-like Response

As the teachers or interns read the book aloud, students displayed physical behavioral changes. They shifted their desks or their bodies in their chairs to better see the book. In the early stages of the stories (character and setting development), students’

eyebrows were raised or furrowed. As the plot developed, students often blurted out verbal responses, particularly in the form of questions and predictions. At various junctures of the story, students laughed or gasped. As the stories neared completion, students became noticeably still and quiet, so much so that the only sounds in the room were the teachers' voices and the turn of the pages. When the teachers finished the books, physical responses included slumping forward, stretching, smiling, clapping, and sighing. Verbal responses were numerous and unrestrained.

Variations in student engagement with the picture book during its reading occurred by age group. Overall, the twelfth grade students were unconcerned about their peers' responses and kept their focus on the book itself. I never observed students in this group looking side-to-side. Instead, they seemed to feel at ease gazing at the book. Three of these older students went to sleep and, in fact, reported on their post-reading survey that they correlated the present story with being read to at bed-time as a young child, a practice intended to make them feel sleepy.

The ninth grade students, however, spent more time observing their classmates' reactions to the picture book, often glancing at the students seated near them. One student, Chandra, stated loudly that she was not going to listen to "another stupid book about Anne Frank" and put her head down on her desk (all case study participants' names have been changed for their privacy). Within minutes, though, she was sitting up and listening intently. Class-wide concern over peer reactions also diminished as the stories progressed.

After hearing the picture books and completing the activities in each lesson, students responded to a survey intended to give them an opportunity to reflect on the

picture book experience. Their written observations also revealed child-like reactions. The ninth grade students who heard *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985) reported that the book made them feel sad, an emotional response indicated by over two-thirds of the class. They also often said that being read to made them “feel like a kid again.”

After hearing *The firekeeper’s son* (Park, 2009), the twelfth grade students also reported that hearing the book elicited childhood memories and feelings. Over half the students referred to their mother, father, older siblings, or elementary school teachers reading to them when they were younger. Along with these recollections, they shared beliefs such as, “My dad really loves me,” and “My mom is always teaching me.” Their reactions to the picture book called forth emotions not often observed in a twelfth grade English class, many connected to childhood experiences. They reported that having a picture book read to them made them feel happy, relaxed, young, free-spirited, full of joy, or safe.

Several days after the twelfth graders heard *The firekeeper’s son*, the intern Ms. Panullo called students’ attention to the book *Don’t let the pigeon drive the bus* (Willems, 2003). With this second picture book introduction, the positive response was almost unanimous, and the child-like behavior was elevated. Students clapped, voiced approval, and punched the air. They quietly and quickly created a semi-circle around Ms. Panullo without being asked to. When Mr. Healy, the classroom teacher, saw their positive response, he later reflected, “It really impacted me, how much students truly enjoyed these books.”

The ninth grade advanced studies group also reported “feeling like a kid again” as they listened to and looked at *Tops & bottoms* (Stevens, 1995). They recalled trips to the

media center in elementary school during which the media specialist read illustrated stories, as well as hearing picture books read by their teachers. Several students recollected being read to by their parents. Other students cited sensations such as relaxed, happy, stress-free, calm, at ease, and nostalgic as they heard the story. One young man conveyed a sense of wistfulness, saying quietly, “It’s been a long time since someone read me a story.” Their teacher, Mr. Evans, noticed that, for this group of his students, “They felt free to just sit back and be a kid.” He admitted he was surprised by how much the advanced studies students enjoyed the picture books.

In the teacher interviews following the unit in which the picture books were used, Mr. Healy and Ms. Panullo often remarked on their students’ child-like reactions to the books. They noticed a new and surprising level of excitement in the classroom. Ms. Panullo commented that the students dropped their typical sarcasm when discussing the books and behaved in a non-self-conscious way. She said, too, in the ensuing weeks, when students finished work before the end of the class period, they clamored, “Read us a book! Read us a book!” Several weeks after the case concluded, I met with Mr. Healy on an unrelated matter. He mentioned several times that his students were still asking to be read picture books. Noticing the same behavior with his students, Mr. Evans postulated that picture books cause a fond wistfulness for students to return to their childhoods.

Resistance

It must be noted, however, that not all students responded positively to the picture book concept. One striking occurrence took place with Kimberly, a bright student in Mr. Healy’s language arts class, and a self-acknowledged future literature major. She

declined to complete the picture book survey. In a separate note to her teachers, she expressed dismay at being subjected to such an inferior lesson, describing it as “beneath senior honors level work” with no applicability to college preparation. When subsequent picture books were read, she rolled her eyes, sighed heavily, or put her head down on her desk.

Mr. Healy felt that some of his students probably viewed the picture books as insulting to their intelligence, but chose not to share their views on their surveys. He was surprised that more students did not openly exhibit Kimberly’s reaction.

In Mr. Evans’ advanced placement classes, one young man named Roland wrote in his reflection that the picture book “was way too simple for our grade level” and that “it did not help my understanding of geography at all.” Several times in his reflection, he used the word “easy” and underlined it for emphasis. He asserted that the picture book had taken the place of “real, actual work.”

As mentioned before, in Mr. Evan’s World Cultural Geography class, Chandra showed initial resistance to the picture book. After announcing that she would not listen to the story, she turned away from the intern, Ms. Terra, and put her head down. After a few minutes, though, the story captured her attention, and she sat up and engaged with class. Mr. Evans and Ms. Terra later privately remarked to me that her attentiveness during the remainder of class was in stark contrast to her usual low level of engagement. To their surprise, she continued to maintain a high level of engagement throughout the entire unit and thereafter.

On-task Behaviors

One way to gauge students' attentiveness is to check for on-task behaviors.

During the picture book read-alouds, I noted whether students' body language suggested they were engaged with the story (facing the reader/book, exhibiting facial responses to the story, reacting verbally, etc.). The following table illustrates the number of students not displaying on-task behaviors during my observations:

| | | Number of Students Off Task | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|---------|---------|
| Class | Picture Book Title | Check 1 | Check 2 | Check 3 |
| World Cultural Geography | <i>Rose Blanche</i> | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| English IV Honors | <i>The Firekeeper's Son</i> | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| | <i>Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus</i> | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | <i>The Lion and the Mouse</i> | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| AP Human Geography | <i>Tops & Bottoms</i> | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | <i>The Rusty Trusty Tractor</i> | 0 | 1 | 0 |

While the picture books were being read, students' level of engagement clearly was high.

Teacher Perception

Overwhelmingly, all four teachers indicated that the strongest attribute of picture book use is student engagement. Mr. Evans said, "Students who were typically less engaged were likely to be more engaged while we were reading the picture books." He added, "The students who are not typically focused ...were the ones paying the closest

attention.” For Mr. Evans, these are particularly telling statements, as he’s making them in reference to a class he described before the case studies began as “difficult.” He explained that their negative, off-task behaviors, although masking insecurity about academic performance, were so distracting that teaching the class had become challenging for him and his intern. They spent so much of their time responding to off-task behaviors (students talking off topic, out of their seats, refusing to begin assignments, etc.), that there was little instruction and learning taking place.

He chose a book for the picture book case study in hopes that *Rose Blanche* would serve as an effective anticipatory set for students’ subsequent reading of *Night* (Wiesel, 2006). The result far exceeded his expectations. He and Ms. Terra confirmed that, although typically a lower-performing and higher off-task group than their other World Cultural Geography class, the picture book class was far more engaged while reading *Night*. He surmised that picture books are “a great tool” and was “very pleased” with their effectiveness at increasing student engagement.

Mr. Healy observed, too, that picture books served as a surprisingly effective stimulant to student engagement. Reflecting on the case study, he said, “The one thing I noticed, more than anything else, was just more engagement.” He felt that from the first reading throughout the unit, there was a “higher level of engagement,” even as the students approached and connected with the complex and difficult *The canterbury tales* (Chaucer). Much like Chandra in Mr. Evans’ class, Jarod, a quiet, respectful football player who sat in the back of class, exhibited strong signs of connecting with the picture books and content throughout the unit. Typically impassive, his face and body language

revealed keen interest in the lessons and discussions. Mr. Healy remarked that, before the case study, “No matter what I did, I couldn’t get Jarod engaged.”

Curiosity

An interesting aspect of RQ1 surfaced as the case studies evolved: curiosity from students *not* participating in the case study classes. Mr. Evans teaches four sections of Advanced Placement Human Geography, but we decided to only include the picture books in two sections of the class. He propped up the two picture books in the marker tray of his dry erase board, which the students’ desks face. Students in all of his classes drifted to the books, picking them up and reading through them. He noticed that his students were “infatuated” with the books. He went on to say that, “Kids just love books—they love to hold them, and they love the pictures.” When the non-case study students discovered that Mr. Evans would not be reading them the stories, they were good-naturedly miffed. He reported they said, “What? You aren’t going to read us these books? We want to hear *The Rusty Trusty Tractor!*” Students are naturally curious, and picture books simply being present in their environment can stimulate interest and inquiry.

RQ2: Classroom Culture and Climate

My second research question was: What changes occur in the classroom culture and climate as a result of including a picture book in a unit of study? Admittedly, this question is the most difficult to measure of the three research questions. Defining terms such as “culture” and “climate” is slippery business, at best, yet any teacher with even a modicum of intuition has felt the certainty of these concepts in their own and their colleague’s classrooms. Classroom climates can range from inviting to hostile, and the

culture teachers establish—whether consciously or not—reveal whether there is an atmosphere of trust underpinning the environment.

Picture books, the research suggests, can help establish an atmosphere that fosters community. The results of these case studies strongly support that view.

Students and Stress

In advanced studies courses, especially as college entrance demands become ever more rigorous, students' stress reaches high levels. Notably in Mr. Evans' AP Human Geography course, I saw students behaving much like young corporate executives operating under intense pressure and condensed time. Their planners were always open on their desks, and every new assignment was quickly noted. The students frequently asked questions about the specific content of upcoming quizzes and tests. They reminded their teacher of due dates when uncertainty arose. And when weighty assignments were due on dates conflicting with those for other courses, students respectfully expressed concern.

Mr. Evans felt that the picture books assisted in alleviating his students' stress. He described days when, "students come into my class when they have two or three tests, and they're just so stressed out." He believes these students have come to associate learning with stress, which may not be conducive. Using a picture book sent them the message that learning need not induce anxiety. And regardless of whatever other positive effects occur, reducing the stress level of his students has value in and of itself, he believes.

His students saw the connection between the picture book and reduced stress, as well. Jocelyn said, "I actually read picture books all the time because they are a great

stress relief.” Another student cited his enjoyment of the picture books’ illustrations because “all the books I read these days don’t have any.” Shelly noted that the picture book enabled her to “feel less serious, which helped open my mind.” She added that the picture book gave class a sense of relaxation. Other students described the picture book as a break from their heavy workloads.

Fun in the Classroom

During our post-case study interview, the teachers and interns expressed some concern about the picture books creating a sense of fun in the classroom, but the students had no such reservations. They often said they enjoyed hearing and seeing the books, and a great deal of laughter accompanied the lessons, including from the teachers. Several of Mr. Healy’s students reminisced about the sense of fun they experienced reading their favorite picture books as a child, especially Dr. Seuss titles, and they connected that sense of fun to the new picture books. The same was true in Mr. Evans’ advanced studies classes. They described “the fun mood,” “being entertained,” “joy,” and a “fun way to learn” that the picture books gave them.

Mr. Evans admitted that he felt a sense of fun on the days he read picture books. He laughed recalling the jelly donut contest and the colloquial “Whangadang!” from *The rusty trusty tractor* (Cowley, 2000). He observed, too, that the students did not notice they were learning because they were having fun.

Reaction to “Work”

Another theme that arose was students’ automatic suspicion of and negative reaction to perceived “work.” I often noticed students delay getting started on an assignment or asking for assistance on a task before exerting initial attempts. These are

aspects of work avoidance or work resistance, and they are common in high school classrooms.

However, during the picture book read-alouds and most of the subsequent related activities, students did not display behaviors that resisted “work.” In fact, they seemed to suspect they were not working at all. Ms. Panallo noticed that her students did not attempt to lead her away from any of the picture books readings or discussion. Mr. Evans’ students exhibited surprise at “getting out of work.” One student said it “gave [her] a break from school.” The “take a break” idea surfaced many times in connection with “AP college level work” and “difficult concepts.” Another student said that she “sees enough words on a daily basis,” and the illustrations gave her a respite. Two students blatantly stated that the picture book was “not real work” and did not “take much effort.” Clearly students have disconnected the idea of learning from an experience that could offer enjoyment.

Hearing Stories

Panousis asserted, “No matter how old they are, students love to be read to” (1999, p. 29). Ms. Panullo shared the same belief and felt strongly that the read-alouds explains students’ heightened engagement and positive classroom experience. She believes the students were more likely to risk involvement in class discussions as a result of her read-alouds. Mr. Healy, too, believed that the auditory reading explained students’ willingness to engage, as well as improved assessment performance (see RQ3 below). They both asserted that the overall climate in the classroom was noticeably more positive during the read-alouds and discussions.

The Language Arts students corroborated this theory in their written reflections. Many began their journals thus: “When my mom read to me ...” or “When my dad read that book to me ...” Ms. Panullo’s read-alouds may have directly connected the students to their early childhood experiences, and brought that sense of wonder directly into the classroom.

Mr. Healy believes that students—indeed, all people—simply love stories. That love, he thinks, contributed to the unique classroom climate during the picture book lessons. “Picture books bring students back to the time when stories were read purely for the love of a good story.” He went on to say that picture books tap into humanity’s centuries-old affinity for great stories, for the way they connect people to each other through shared tales. One of his students remarked, “I felt like I was part of the story when it was read to me.” His insight explains, in large part, the hush that settled over his class near the end of each picture book, as the classroom community shared in the experience both as individuals and collectively.

Trust and Community

As I discussed in the literature review, a sense of trust is a key aspect of a positive classroom environment. Picture books can foster that sense of trust between the students and teacher.

The first quality I noticed in Mr. Evans’ World Cultural Geography class was tension. The students’ facial expressions exhibited stress, and they were not completing their bellwork assignment. Ms. Terra was calling out students by name with reminders to turn around, stop talking, and so on. Work avoidance behaviors were in abundance, and Ms. Terra’s exasperation was evident.

Several days passed in much the same manner until the picture book read-aloud. On that day, the atmosphere in the classroom changed markedly. Ms. Terra later commented that she was surprised at her students' behavior, noting that engagement was high and disruptions were low. It important to note that she also reported feeling "very comfortable" in class that day.

In attempting to explain this phenomena, Mr. Healy made a statement that applies to all of the picture book students: "What picture books do is unite the class on an emotional level." He theorized that the shared experience that connected to childhood memories (including for the teacher) coalesced the entire group in a way that no other teaching tool can. And then he wished aloud he had shared the picture books with more of his classes.

Teacher Change

Bringing a new instructional methodology to the classroom stimulates teacher reflection about their practices—which inevitably improves the classroom culture and situates the teacher alongside the students in a learning role. Sharing picture books with students is no exception. The following list describes some of the awarenesses the teachers noticed of themselves during the case studies:

- A need for improved student rapport
- A desire to investigate students' early reading experiences, whether positive or negative
- The criticality of scaffolding learning
- Motivation to try new instructional methods

- Guilt and self-criticism when lessons are not effective, if even for only one student
- The importance of reflective teaching
- Bringing creativity to the classroom
- The need to be sensitive to students' individual learning styles
- The necessity of frequently using advanced organizers
- The importance of direct, explicit instruction
- An awareness of the complexity of the teenage experience

RQ3: Student Learning

Finally, I wanted to understand whether the use of picture books impacted the students' mastery of the material. In other words, were the learning goals of the teachers achieved? Although not as obvious as the clear link to engagement, student learning was impacted, especially among the ELLs and those students who are less likely to be successful at reading tasks. As I evaluated the data, I noticed that learning gains clustered around skill acquisition and connecting to prior knowledge. Perhaps just as significantly, though, the picture books dramatically stimulated students' verbal response, both in quantity and quality.

Aesthetic and Efferent Stances

As noted, students hold specific beliefs about the concepts of work and learning. Because they tend to associate these ideas with unpleasantness, some students could not conceive of an aesthetic activity having usefulness or value, and that perception affected their learning. While many clearly enjoyed the read-alouds, they also questioned their

purpose in the unit. When Mr. Evans asked students to consider how concepts in *The rusty trusty tractor* connected to agribusiness, one student blurted out, “You read that to us for a *reason*?”

Ms. Panullo believes that students are so often expected to produce artifacts or an immediate correct response that they have difficulty simply immersing in a story. For example, as Mr. Evans introduced *Tops & bottoms*, his students asked if they should take notes on the book. In the post-reading reflections, two students admitted to liking the book, but worried that it did not have a direct link to their agriculture studies—or if it had, they worried that they had missed it. One student lamented, “I liked it, but I didn’t learn anything.” Another said, “The book was pointless, but fun.” As will be discussed below, many students saw direct links to their study and demonstrated learning. But for some, their suspicion of an aesthetic activity blocked learning.

From another perspective, some students demonstrated an inability to leave an efferent stance. Rather than fully engaging in an aesthetic reading experience, their thinking persisted in an analytic mode. For this group, though, efferent thinking did not negatively affect their learning, and in fact, may have enhanced it. Mr. Healy’s students, in response to the question, “What did you think of the picture book you heard today?” used words such as inference, moralistic, comprehension, culture, honor, complex, responsibility, and resourcefulness—all indicating a strong analytic approach to the activity. Because this question used the word “think” and because their teacher had worked assiduously to build a classroom culture that valued higher order thinking, their responses were appropriate. It is simply interesting to note that they brought an efferent mentality to an essentially aesthetic task. Their responses proved particularly useful as

Ms. Panullo linked the picture book to specific skill acquisition (characterization via textual analysis and inference).

The difficulty in leaving an efferent stance was even more pronounced with Mr. Evans' advanced studies students. In response to the same "think" question, some students retold the story in detail. Another assessed its use: "I found it to be very informative with its use of fairy tale qualities, and I believe the lack of rhymes means it was meant for third grade." Another described the "cunning protagonist and metaphors." Perhaps even more revealing were the same students' responses to the question, "How did you *feel* as Mr. Evans read the story?" Four students critiqued Mr. Evans' delivery of the story, surmising that he was passionate, enthusiastic, and engaging, and that he maintained correct tone and pace. Clearly leaving an efferent stance to experience a range of feelings in class was not easy for many of Mr. Evans' students. Yet engagement was quite high, and students demonstrated learning. As Mr. Healy postulated, it could be that some students can successfully straddle both stances—aesthetic and efferent—and that teachers should strive for this balance.

Verbal Response

A factor I had not anticipated surfacing in this study was a change in students' on-topic verbal activity. A key indicator of cognitive activity is the quantity and quality of students' verbal responses. Both were in abundant evidence on the days of the picture book read-alouds. This was particularly fascinating in Mr. Evans' World Cultural Geography class.

When Ms. Terra showed students the cover of *Rose Blanche*, she asked students to make observations about the illustration depicted. Ideas and predictions were shouted

out from all over the room, some more credible than others. The students' verbal outpouring bordered on uncontrolled, and Mr. Evans and Ms. Terra both appeared frustrated. However, as an observer, I could see that, although the students were ignoring class norms, such as raising hands and taking turns, the barrage of shout-outs were on-topic.

At the close of *Rose Blanche*, Ms. Terra asked students to consider the changes that occurred in the story. Here, the quality of students' verbal responses was particularly evident. One noticed that a shift in the narrator's point of view took place, from first to third person, and then speculated why. Students' word choices were noticeably sophisticated: dislocated, paradigm, corruption, isolation, and Nazi-power are a few examples. However, when Ms. Terra asked students to craft a paragraph using the same prompt, their word choices reflected their characteristically less sophisticated responses (i.e., sad, died, fat, beat up). The on-topic quantity and quality of the verbal responses were noticeably elevated on the day of the picture book read-alouds.

Mr. Healy and Ms. Panullo also noticed an increase in verbal responses with their students who were typically less engaged. Overall, Ms. Panullo thought, "More kids wanted to talk and ask questions and discuss the book." The typically inert fifth period class was more talkative (and on-topic) on their picture book days, and although their "wild explanations" of *The lion and the mouse* (Pinkney, 2009) frustrated Ms. Panullo, she was very pleased to see them formulate interpretative ideas about the subject of the story. During the first picture book read-aloud, I counted twelve unique responses to a discussion question Ms. Panullo posed—a figure that astounded her later when I shared it. For all three case studies, I often wrote in my field notes, "I hear a lot of excited shout-

outs, but I can't catch them all" or "Quite a few comments; impossible to discern all."

Several times, as Ms. Panullo attempted to settle her students for a picture book, she said, "Just *listen*."

In Mr. Evans highly cerebral advanced studies classes, the during-reading comments also increased, but they tended to be more emotional, such as "Oh, no!" or "Uh-oh." Those students were also more likely to express confusion and pose questions as they listened, such as "Why is the hay green?" or "What is grass seed?"

Finally, all four teachers expressed mild exasperation in formal and informal interviews at the increase in verbal stimulation, admitting that students seemed a bit out of control at times. They all had moments of recognition, though, during the reading and discussion, typified by Ms. Panullo: "I suddenly realized, in all this talking, 'Wait a minute; they're not trying to get me to do something else.'"

Improved Understanding of Skills and Concepts

In this current climate of data driven instruction, it is natural to wonder if picture book use improves student mastery. I approached this question from a qualitative perspective, recording instances of improved understanding and discussing learning gains with the teachers, but I also briefly explored quantitative assessment analysis. I address both results here.

Mr. Healy felt a strength of picture books was in using them to teach specific skills. To do so for an entire unit of study "was really impressive," he said. He added that the test scores for the Middle Ages unit (which included characterization assessment questions) were lowest in the class where the picture books were *not* read. Typically, the control group outperformed his other Language Arts Honors sections, so Mr. Healy said

these results were unusual. However, on the creative assessment, Mr. Healy felt that the picture book groups' work lacked depth of understanding. Individual examples of student improvement abounded. I listened to Mr. Healy and Ms. Panullo exclaim in surprise and happiness as they examined test scores for students who usually do not perform well on assessments. Finally, he pointed out that, specific questions that the majority of students missed pertained to sections of *The canterbury tales* that were not read aloud to the students.

Mr. Evans was far less prepared to draw a link between picture book use and learning. For his World Cultural Geography students, he conceded that the picture book "helped [the students] and pulled them up to where they should to be," but he also said "academically, I don't know that it had major impact."

For his advanced studies students, though, Mr. Evans did not discern any increase in student learning. He said the picture books did not "have any bearing on the unit," and he "would like to have seen [students] make more of a connection between the books and the concepts." Student reflections on *Tops & bottoms*, though, reveal that many found the books as a helpful way to learn about agriculture. Several had participated in an American History class the previous year in which the teacher incorporated picture books. Therefore, those students were predisposed to view a picture book as a learning tool. Others, with no recent picture book exposure, made observations such as, "[the picture book] was a great way to get our minds moving in the direction of the new unit," and "the story enriched themes taught in our normal curriculum." Another student drew concept connections, reflecting that the story "had to do with the growing of agriculture and how different plants grow." Students described the book as intellectual, a teaching

tool, and educational. Five used the words “related” or “relating” to draw a connection from the picture book to the unit of study. One simply stated, “That was a fun way to learn about farming” and another, after hearing Mr. Evans discuss the connection between *The rusty trusty tractor* and agribusiness, mused, “That book made all of this a lot easier to understand.”

Test Data

Although the results are not conclusive, it is important to briefly review the multiple choice assessment results from each unit of study. Question by question results were not available for the World Cultural Geography class, so it is only possible to analyze the results in aggregate. Results are outlined in the following table:

| Class Period | Picture Book Used | Number of students | Test Average | Test Median | Test Mode |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| 6 | Yes | 23 | 72% | 73% | 85% |
| 7 | No | 20 | 73% | 68% | 68% |

Three things are noteworthy about this data. First, although Mr. Evans described sixth period as typically performing far lower than seventh, their average test score was only one percentage point lower. Second, the picture book group’s test median (middle) score was five points higher than the control group, and finally, their most frequently occurring score (mode) was 17 points higher than the control group.

For the Language Arts Honors and the AP Human Geography classes, I had detailed test data, so I could analyze the results question by question. Because this study

was not intended to be quantitative, I limited my analysis to two or three questions per test.

For Mr. Healy's classes, I selected three test questions directly aimed at assessing characterization. There were nine characterization questions altogether, so I narrowed my scope by choosing three that were higher order in nature. Students who heard the picture books had ample practice with characterization skills using the books as models. Students in the control group learned about characterization through direct instruction, cooperative learning, and independent practice.

The questions I selected were:

15. Chaucer's characterizations of the Prioress, the Monk, and others connected with the church are mainly meant to do what?
 - a. Characterize the church as a beacon of greatness
 - b. Characterize the church in a realistic manner
 - c. Characterize the church in a flattering manner
 - d. Characterize the church in a critical manner
16. Which of the following quotations from "The Prologue" is the best example of Indirect Characterization?
 - a. "He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark, with smudges where his armor left a mark"
 - b. "And though so much distinguished he was wise"
 - c. "There was a Knight a most distinguished man"
 - d. "He had done nobly in a sovereign war"
23. The Pardoner's pious story reveals what about his character?
 - a. Honesty
 - b. Hypocrisy
 - c. Sensitivity
 - d. Ignorance

The test results for these three questions were:

| Class Period | Picture Book Used | Number of Students | % Correct on Number 15 | % Correct on Number 16 | % Correct on Number 23 | Overall Test Average |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Yes | 22 | 40.9 | 50 | 95.5 | 77 |
| 5 | Yes | 18 | 44.4 | 55.6 | 66.7 | 75 |
| 6 | No | 19 | 52.6 | 84.2 | 89.5 | 74 |

Although the class that did not hear and see the picture book had the lowest class average, they trended higher on the individual characterization questions. When I shared this observation with Mr. Healy (via email), he replied:

Period six is a much higher performing group of students. I'm not surprised that they outperformed the other two classes. What was so nice to see was that the difference between sixth period and other classes was much smaller. The gap is shrinking. Ultimately, that's one of the best reflections of the picture book. Sixth period may have performed higher, but they didn't show the same amount of learning gains. They performed on par with where they have been with previous assessments. The other two classes showed much more growth. To me, that's a primary indicator of success. (email communication, 3/23/11)

Finally, the AP Human Geography students took an end-of-unit assessment that contained 30 multiple choice questions. These two were loosely connected with the picture book *The rusty trusty tractor*:

13. Commercial agriculture is distinguished from subsistence agriculture by all but which of the following?
 - a. Heavy use of machinery
 - b. Output consumed on the farm
 - c. Farm size
 - d. Low percentage of farmers in the labor force
 - e. Surplus production

14. In the United States many farms are integrated into a large food production industry. This is known as
- a. Commercial farming
 - b. Mixed crop and livestock farming
 - c. Agribusiness
 - d. Food processing
 - e. Mechanized farming

The two sections of classes performed similarly on the questions, with 47.8% of period four students answering number 13 correct, and 52.2% of period five students answering the same question correct. Students fared much better on question number 14, with periods four and five answering it correctly 95.6% and 91.3% of the time, respectively. Question 13 is more difficult, requiring students to compare two concepts and then parse out all but one variance, whereas question 14 requires only a definition recall. In any case, without control group data, the teachers' and students' anecdotal responses are better indicators of concept mastery—and that evidence is inconclusive.

Connecting to Prior Knowledge

Aside from unit assessments, I noted instances in which the picture books stimulated connections to prior knowledge. This observation was particularly evident in one of the case studies conducted in Mr. Evans' classes.

At the outset of the picture book project with World Cultural Geography students, the goal was to improve students' understanding of engagement with Elie Wiesel's *Night*. What Mr. Evans noticed, though, was the picture book also served as an effective refresher of knowledge about World War II students had gained in classes taken previous to his. Students read *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1953) in eighth grade, and he said, "*Rose Blanche* did such a good job of serving as a bridge between that and *Night*." He felt the

picture book created a link to background knowledge, giving students confidence to proceed with new information acquisition.

Mr. Evans also felt that the picture book was a particularly effective hook for the introduction of a new unit. Used as an anticipatory set, he said the picture book offered his students a way to focus their attention on a specified topic, giving them a jumping off point into the details of the lesson's content. He noticed that the principle held true for all of his picture book students, whether below level or advanced. "Taking the time to attach a picture book to the learning" has value, he said. Ms. Panullo added, "Reminding students of what they already know goes a long way toward easing them into the new concepts."

English Language Learners (ELLs)

Both teachers felt strongly that the picture books had particular impact with their struggling readers. Mr. Healy saw that "the low level reader is able to understand the surface meaning without struggling and then is able to move forward and engage the primary skill being taught."

Nowhere was this more noticeable than with Mr. Evans' ELLs. After a couple of days of watching his ELLs read *Night* with no comprehension, Mr. Evans discussed the problem with his colleagues teaching the same course. The teachers decided to cover each other's classes for a day, so that Mr. Evans could take all of the ELLs to the media center to read them *Rose Blanche*. Referring to them as the ELL pullout group, Mr. Evans said, "the book aided so much more in learning for them" than any other tool he had tried, including iPod audio recordings of the books. "I wish you could have seen them 'get it' after they heard *Rose Blanche*," he said to me. For students with little

European studies backgrounds and limited English proficiency, the picture book was *the* link to learning.

Conclusions and Future Research Directions

There is a viable instructional use for picture books in high school classrooms. Teachers who take the time to address the needs of older and perhaps resistant learners will observe gains in the areas of student engagement, classroom community, and skill and concept acquisition. Teachers will also likely experience the desire to find new methods for instructional delivery and assessment. Added benefits, but no less key, include improved relationships and a spirit of joy in the classroom.

More quantitative study on assessments would enable teachers to fully realize the potential of picture books. I recommend a case study in which picture books are incorporated into multiple access points of a lesson. Furthermore, an assessment created at the same time as the unit of study, specifically targeted at the skills and concepts addressed by the picture books and other texts in the set, would facilitate a better understanding of the effectiveness of the picture books. Finally, instead of comparing assessment data between a case study group and a control group, a more accurate reflection would compare the case study group results to test data from earlier units, with the goal of addressing learning gains.

Related areas of interest that this case study unearthed also include:

- The impact of read-alouds with older students
- Teacher willingness to demonstrate personal vulnerability—and the potential impact on student engagement and learning

- A comparative analysis of language arts instructional methods between early elementary and high school classrooms
- Guidelines for effective picture book selection for high school learners
- Case studies that address picture book use in subject areas such as mathematics and science

Further research would explore the ways which a combined aesthetic and efferent reading task can aid students' literacy development.

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